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ABSTRACT

Kindergarten teachers should be concerned with the development of the child physically, psychologically, and socially. The development of readiness for reading should be part of the child's day-by-day activities in the kindergarten. Structured prereading activities should be conducted in informal, game-like ways. They should involve the active participation of the children and should not include paper-and-pencil workbook activities. (Many suggestions are given for developing skills in oral language, auditory perception and discrimination, visual perception and discrimination, and eye-hand coordination.) (MKM)

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READING AND THE KINDERGARTEN CHILD

Should reading be a concern of the kindergarten teacher? Yes! Why? Because the kindergarten experience can be used to provide a foundation for later success in reading.

What should the kindergarten teacher know about reading and the kindergarten child? She (or he) should know about reading -- both as process and as skill development, and she (or he) should know how the kindergarten can be a specific agent in children's development for reading. Each of these aspects is discussed below.

One View of Reading - Reading as Process

There is no single entity that can be termed reading. Reading is a composite - a network - of many components that interact and interlock with one another. It is a cohesive process that integrates various aspects of the individual's physical, psychological, and social functioning.

First, and most fundamentally, reading involves the physical factor of vision. The child needs to have sufficient visual acuity to see the printed symbols and to see them clearly and distinguishably. Other important visual attributes are: visual discrimination (ability to distinguish likenesses and differences among printed symbols); visual tracking (correct left-to-right directionality of eye movements); visual memory (retention of the visual image); and visual blending (ability to blend letters into words).

Audition is another physical factor in the reading process, particularly during the beginning stage of reading when the child is learning to associate

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particular graphemes (letters and letter clusters) with particular sounds. This auditory component includes: auditory acuity (ability to hear clearly); auditory discrimination (ability to distinguish likenesses and differences among sounds); auditory memory (ability to retain the auditory image); and auditory blending (ability to blend discrete sounds into words). An associated speech element is present in beginning reading, too, since articulation is entailed in the recoding of the written symbol (single letter, letter cluster, or word) into its oral equivalent. Moreover, the visual, auditory, and articulatory components are interrelated and interdependent.

Other physical factors that are of significance in the reading process are general health, motor coordination (including eye-hand coordination), maturation, and neurological development. These factors, themselves, are often interrelated and thus have an interactive effect upon the child's progress in learning to read.

The psychological component of the reading process includes both intellectual (cognitive) and emotional factors. Intellectual factors include mental capacity or mental maturity (the individual's level of ability to understand that which is seen, heard, or experienced in some way); mental content (the individual's stock of concepts and the appropriate language labels for these concepts -- both of which grow out of the individual's life experiences); and oral language proficiency (vocabulary and sentency usage).

The intellectual factors interact with one another to produce the kinds of thinking that reading subsumes: cognition of the printed symbols, primarily the words; memory of the words and the meanings they represent; convergent and divergent reasoning in relation to the content of the reading material (usually termed "comprehension"); and critical evaluation of the

ideas and presentation. As Spache notes: "...the act of reading is not a word recognition act or a translation of words, but a fluent almost instanteous combining of words into complete thoughts....one does not simply read the printed word, he reacts to what it says, bringing to bear all his language-thinking experiences."[1]

The child's emotional adjustment - both long term and immediate - plays a significant role in the reading process. The emotionally stable child generally is comfortable in the classroom and able to attend to the reading task with full psychic energy, while the child with emotional problems is not. Furthermore, success with reading reinforces the positive self-concept of the emotionally stable child, further enhancing that child's emotional adjustment. On the other hand, a child who did not appear to have emotional difficulties may develop these as a result of failure and frustration in learning to read, leading to a negative concept of himself or herself as a reader and to a negative attitude towards reading in general.

The emotional overtones in the reading process may be a cause or an effect of reading difficulties, operating cyclically. The emotional problem may lead to a reading problem which then exacerbates the emotional problem, which then has a negative effect on the child's reading, and so on, in a vicious circle. Or the frustration produced by failure in initial reading development may lead to an emotional traumatization which then produces further interference with learning to read, and so on.

The socio-cultural component of the reading process includes the home, community, and school of a particular pupil. Again, we quote Spache:

> The reading process is undoubtedly based on sociological roots. Reading differs in its purposes, breadth, and quality among societies as well as among social classes within societies. Social factors such as education, cultural interests, income level, family stability, and vocational adjustment all affect the child's purpose and use of the reading process. These factors determine the quantity and quality of reading materials available as well as the reading habits of the family and community, thus, in turn, influencing the reading behaviors of the child.[2]

The school is the most significant social agency for the reading process once the child starts attending school. The classroom environment is a potent force in how the child will perceive reading in relation to himself or herself, and how the child will function in reading activities. Factors within the classroom environment itself include the materials available for reading instruction and practice, the methodologies and techniques used by the teacher, and most important of all, the teacher's knowledge, skills, and attitudes concerning reading, learning, and child development.

A Second View of Reading - Reading as Skill Development

Reading per se may be viewed in terms of its various skill components. These include word identification, comprehension, and fluency. Word identification refers to both the recognition of the word (recoding the printed symbol into its oral equivalent) and the understanding of the word's meaning. Techniques of word identification encompass picture clues, configuration clues, semantic and syntactic contextual clues, phonic analysis, and morphemic analysis (analysis of the word into its units of meaning such as prefix, root, suffix, inflectional ending). Looking up words in a dictionary is also a word identification technique.

Comprehension subsumes three levels of understanding in relation to written materials: literal level, interpretive level, and evaluative level. Literal comprehension is the understanding of the directly stated and clearly indicated information. Interpretive comprehension reflects the reasoning done with the literal information to formulate inferences of various kinds, and also involves the reader's own background of experiences in relation to the material. Evaluative comprehension reflects the critical kinds of

judgments made by the reader in regard to the material read and the authorship of that material.

Fluency is reflected in both oral and silent reading, but in different manifestations. Fluent oral reading includes the following characteristics: "adequate articulation of words; flexibility in rate, pitch, and volume; proper phrasing; effective use of pauses; appropriate facial expressions and body movements".[3] Silent reading fluency is manifested by appropriate rate of reading for the material being read and the purpose for which it is being read, and the flexibility to vary the silent reading rate accordingly. Oral reading is concerned with effective speech delivery and communicating with the listeners or audience; Silent reading is concerned with internally grasping the ideas of the writer. In oral reading, every word is read; in silent reading, words may be skipped over so long as the basic ideas are understood.

A View of the Kindergarten in the Reading Process and Skill Development

The kindergarten teacher and the kindergarten environment can serve as developmental agents in the reading process by providing for and facilitating the development of a base of knowledge, skills, and attitudes prerequisite to the child's actual learning to read. A "tour" through an imaginary, but realistic, kindergarten classroom illustrates some of the ways in which elements of the reading process can be developed at the prereading level.

Let us start at the block play area. Block play helps develop visual perception, visual discrimination, hand-eye coordination, augments oral vocabulary by the introduction of new words that can include "cylinder," "ramp," "archway," and the like, in relation to the blocks themselves. Block play also increases oral language usage in the verbal interchanges

among the children building together. Block play also fosters positive feelings about oneself as the child constructs something concrete and receives recognition for his or her efforts.

Now to the housekeeping area. Here, visual perception and discrimination are fostered in such activities as setting the table and dressing dolls with appropriately-sized clothing. These kinds of manipulations also develop hand-eye coordination. Oral language is practiced and furthered by means of the conversations and role-playing of the children. New concepts and the accompanying new vocabulary are acquired in relation to the materials in the housekeeping corner. The housekeeping corner is especially fruitful in the emotional and social development of children who re-enact their own roles and the roles of other significant persons in their lives (e.g., parents, siblings, grandparents, doctors, clergymen, etc.), and who test out new ways of behaving under the guise of "playing" the part.

Arts and crafts activities and materials, including painting at the easel, working with clay, using crayons, paste, scissors, scrap materials, fingerpainting, woodworking, and the like help develop visual perception, visual discrimination, and visual memory in regard to such factors as size, color, shape, proportion, and position. They also promote hand-eye coordination, new concepts ,and vocabulary in conjunction with the materials used and the products made. Emotional well-being is also enhanced by the enjoyment experienced in working with arts and crafts materials as well as by the satisfaction of having made something.

The sand table and water play table or area offer children emotional satisfaction and also promote social development since usually there is more than one child engaged in playing at these areas and the children converse and interact as they play with the sand or water. Visual perception and visual discrimination are fostered through the children's use of materials such as different-sized containers that they fill and empty.

Concepts and vocabulary such as in, into, out, on top of, under, through, and other position words are developed as the children use the sand and the water, and talk to one another and to the teacher about what they are doing.

Science and mathematics areas with both permanent and changing displays of materials (e.g., magnets, prisms, rocks, shells, birds' nests, caged pets, scales, geoboards, cuisinaire rods, etc.) provide opportunities for children to develop visual perception and visual discrimination as well as eye-hand coordination through the manipulation of these materials. They also enrich the child's stock of concepts and related vocabulary.

The music area where songs are sung, rhythmic movement is performed, rhythm instruments are played, and music is listened to helps develop auditory perception, auditory discrimination, auditory memory, and auditory blending, along with concepts and vocabulary relative to the musical experiences. Motor coordination is fostered through body movement. Eye-hand coordination is fostered through the playing of the instruments. Emotional adjustment is a happy by-product of the release and satisfaction derived from participation in musical activities.

The library area develops a familiarity with books, interest in books, and facility in handling books. Stories read to the children promote the development of positive attitudes towards what books have to offer in the way of pleasure and learning. Concepts and vocabulary are enriched. Oral language usage and thinking skills are developed through pupil-pupil discussions and teacher-pupil discussions about the stories read and books perused. In addition, the judicious selection of stories can be used in a bibliotherapeutic approach to help children emotionally and socially.

The toys, games, and puzzles used for table or floor play are valuable for visual perception, visual discrimination, eye-hand coordination, and enrichment of concepts and vocabulary. They are also sources for emotional satisfaction and the development of a feeling of " I can do" on the part of the child. It is important that the children have available to them materials that, while within their capabilities, also present a learning challenge.

The outdoor play area available to many kindergartens is particularly valuable for the development of motor coordination. Outdoor play activities also promote social adjustment since sharing, taking turns, and cooperative play are so often involved. And of course, the larger world outside the kindergarten door offers a multitude of opportunities for acquiring new concepts and vocabulary, and for increasing children's awareness of the relationship between printed words we see in our environment and the words we say for the items labeled. These opportunities include visits to neighborhood stores, firehouse, police station, post office, construction sites, and the like, depending upon the specific area in which the kindergarten is located. Trips to the public library for book selection and storytelling hours are very productive for the development of pre-reading attributes.

In addition to the informal development of pre-reading skills that emanate from an appropriately-supplied kindergarten room and an astute, sensitive kindergarten teacher, some structured activities can be an additional component in the kindergarten foundation for reading. A sampling of such activities follows, organized according to particular aspects of reading as process or as skill development.

Suggested Structured Reading Readiness Activities

For Oral Language Development (vocabulary and sentence usage):

1. Present objects to the children and ask them to describe these in regard to colors, shapes, uses.

2. Present pictures to the children and ask them to tell what is happening in the picture, what their feelings are in relation to items in the picture or the theme of the picture , and ask them questions that require them to make inferences about what is depicted.

3. Present pairs of objects or pictured objects and ask the children to describe the similarities and differences between the members of each pair, and to indicate any relationship between the two, if there is any.

4. Have different children make up descriptions of objects that other children have to name by using the details described.

5. Present a series of sequentially related pictures and ask the children to make up a story for the picture sequence.

For Auditory Skill Development (particularly auditory discrimination):

1. Play two tunes on the same instrument and ask the children if the tunes were the same or different.

2. Play two tunes on different instruments (sometimes the same tune; sometimes different tunes) and ask the children if the tunes are the same or different.

3. Present a particular phoneme to the children and ask them to name other words that begin with that same sound .

4. Present a particular phoneme and then have the children indicate whether or not that same sound is heard in the beginning of a series of words that you say to them.

5. Present a word and ask the children to say other words that rhyme with it.

6. Present a set of pictures to the children and have them pick out two pictures at a time whose names rhyme.

7. Have the children listen to a word and then select the picture, given a choice of two, whose name rhymes with that word.

8. Have the children identify the non-rhyming word in a list of words that you say.

9. Have the children supply a rhyming word that fits an oral description or "riddle" such as " I am thinking of something that sounds like red and that you put pillows on".

10. For auditory memory development, have the children repeat a rhythmic pattern you represent in a clapping or tapping sequence.

11. For auditory memory development, have the children repeat a list of words that you say in the order you said them.

12. For auditory memory development, have the children play a game in which an object is named, and then each child in turn repeats the previous objects named and adds a new one, with all objects named having to begin with the same sound as the first one named.

For Visual Skill Development (particularly visual discrimination)

1. Have the children match round, square, and rectangular lids to containers or boxes with these shapes.

2. Present an object or a picture and have the children find the same object or picture from among a group.

3. Present a group of objects that can be arranged so that each member of the group faces in the same direction, and have the children arrange another group so that its members face in the same direction as the first group.

4. Present a group of objects where all but one member is facing in the same direction, and have the children point out the one that is facing in a different direction.

5. Have the children match dot patterns on dominoes.

6. Have the children relate part to whole by matching missing parts to pictured animals or objects from which these parts have been deleted.

7. Develop figure-ground discrimination by having children match objects to their outlines.

8. Have children match cards containing identical capital letters.

9. Have children match cards containing identical lower-case letters.

10. Have children match cut-out letters to words on cards that begin with the particular letters.

11. For developing left-to-right directionality, have pupils arrange a series of objects, one at a time, proceeding from left to right.

12. For developing left-to-right directionality, have the pupils follow the pictures accompanying a story being read to them in a left-to-right , top-to-bottom sequence.

For Eye-Hand Coordination Development

1. Provide the children with appropriate kinds of scissors and let them cut around the shapes of large circles, squares, rectangles, diamonds.

2. Have the children paste different-sized circles, squares, rectangles, and diamonds onto their outlined shapes on large pieces of paper.

These are only a sampling of the kinds of structured reading readiness activities that the kindergarten teacher can provide. The thoughtful, creative teacher will be able to design many additional learning experiences. The important thing to keep in mind, always, is that the activities be consonant with what we know about child development and how children learn as well as with what we know about the reading process and reading skills.

To Sum It Up

Reading can be considered from two points of view: 1) as an integration of the individual's physical, psychological, and soci-cultural functioning, and 2) as a composite of skill components. It is the first view, the one with a child-centered focus, that concerns the kindergarten teacher. In other words, in kindergarten, the focus should be on the development of the child - physically, psychologically, and socially - rather than on the act of reading. However, although the kindergarten child may not be involved in actual reading itself insofar as skill development is concerned, he or she is "getting ready" for it. This development of readiness for reading unfolds, primarily, in an indirect and gradual, evolutionary manner as part of the child's day-by-day activities in the kindergarten. Structured pre-reading activities that are directly related to the skill components of reading are valuable adjuncts to the informal aspects of the kindergarten experience, but these structured activities should be conducted in informal, game-like ways. They should involve the active participation of the children. Paper-and-pencil workbook and ditto sheet activities should be avoided.

A productive kindergarten environment will contain materials and will have activities that, on a continual,ongoing basis, aid in the development of the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that presage success in the reading activities that will follow the kindergarten experience. The kindergarten teacher, in turn, needs to be aware of the opportunities that these materials and activities provide for developing the various components of the reading process and the skills of the reading act, and must interact with the children so that these materials and activities are used maximally to develop these attributes.

References

1. Spache, George D. and Evelyn B. Spache. Reading in the Elementary School, third edition. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, Inc., 1973, pp. 31-32.

2. Ibid., pp. 21-22.

3. Karlin, Robert. Teaching Elementary Reading, second edition. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1975, p. 329.